

[From the London Academy.]
The Divine Attributes As Expounded by Mediaeval Jewish Theologians.*

By his lucid and scholarly work on the Divine Attributes as Expounded by Jewish Theologians in the Middle Ages, Dr. Kaufman has opened up the way to a recondite and neglected field of research, and filled in a defective page in the general history of human thought. The writer protests against the preconception that the literature of which he treats, is either an isolated phenomenon on the one hand, or a servile plagiarism from the Arabic, itself borrowed, on the other; and he doubts not but that the evidence which he has adduced, will suffice to prove to any unbiased mind the independence and the progressiveness of the mediaeval Jewish philosophy. The period of which he treats, viz., from the tenth to the twelfth centuries, was the age of Saadja Geron, Salomon Ibn Gabirol, and Jehuda Halewi, of Joseph Ibn Zaddik, Abraham Ibn Daud and Maimonides. The text contains a clear and appreciative exposition of the works of these writers which treat expressly of the matter in hand, while the notes are stored with an abundance of critical observations which are rendered indispensable by the fact that the philosophical writings of the authors in question, with the notable exception of Maimonides, have had but scant justice done to them by former scholars.

The work commences with the system of Saadja, the author of *Emunoth ve-Deoth*, who deals at the outset with the proofs of the existence of the Creator, who is at the same time knowable and incapable of being represented by comparisons with created things, as the Scripture itself teaches; whence it follows that the attributes which imply such comparisons can only be treated as figures of speech, or at best as approximations to the truth. Men should, therefore, be solicitous about the meaning which underlies the expressions employed, rather than about the terms in which it is conveyed, and should abstain from accumulating attributes in an irrational way, ascribing, e. g., to the Deity as *Omnipotent* the power to do whatsoever an unbridled fancy can imagine, since nothing that is contrary to reason can be predicated of God.

From Saadja we pass to Salomon Ibn Gabirol, the composer of the *Sefer ha-Melchor*, and from him to Jehuda Halewi, who was distinguished for the boldness with which he repudiated the obligation to harmonize religion with philosophy, and challenged the right of speculation to sit in judgment on the faith. His famous work, the *Kusari*, contains a general account of the Jewish religion, together with a refutation of the system of the philosophers, and arguments against the Christian and the Mahomedan religions, in the form of dialogues between the king of the Khazars and a philosopher, a Christian, a Mahomedan and a Jew, respectively.

"The poet with his lively imagination, chose as the occasion of the conversation, the fact of the conversion of the king of the Khazars, who inhabited the Crimea, and of a portion of his people, which took place according to the Arabian historians, in the second half of the eighth century."

The "divine" Aristotle, as Averroes and others deemed him worthy to be called, was boldly pronounced by R. Jehuda to have gone astray. The exist-

ence of God, which his predecessors had laboriously strived to prove, was to him axiomatic; the truths of religion were facts verifiable by the higher consciousness, and not ascertainable by the reasonings of the philosophers, of whom no two could ever be found at unison upon a fundamental principle, except when they agreed to bow to the authority of a third. To the same effect writes Gazali in his *Tahfot al-falasifa*, in which he rates the philosophers for imposing upon their weak brethren, by claiming for their vague metaphysics, the certainty and precision of the exact sciences. In his doctrine of the attributes, R. Jehuda cautions his readers against supposing that terms which are used of the creatures can be transformed without change of connotation to the Creator. In the natural acceptance of the term, we can not say that God is *living*, which would imply the existence in Him of emotions which can only reside in a corporeal subject. Strictly speaking, we should say that He is *not living*, but we avoid the epithet, since it would be liable to be misinterpreted as meaning *dead*, whereas, in truth, the negation of one attribute is not equivalent to the affirmation of its opposite.

Because a stone, for example, is not wise, it does not follow that it is foolish. The stone is too low in the scale of being to serve as the vehicle for such conceptions, and contrariwise the Deity is so exalted, that neither life nor death in the human sense, can be predicated of him.

The same writer goes at length into the discussion of the Divine names (pp. 155, etc.), and Ibn Ezra may have borrowed from him his interpretation of Ex. iii. 13, 14, where the first אהיה is taken to be the Divine Name, in answer to the question of Moses, and the words following its interpretation, אשר אהיה, "because I am."

A section is devoted to the theology of Joseph Ibn Zaddik, who has suffered from misrepresentations (p. 336), owing to a mistranslation or a corruption of the text (אשר אהיה for אל-אשר) of a letter written to Ibn Tibbon by Maimonides, in consequence of which Ibn Zaddik in his *Microcosmos*, is said to have followed the method of the anthropomorphists; the fact being that he is as far from doing this as Maimonides himself, with whom he shows a singular agreement (p. 331) in his refined doctrine of the negative attributes. To avoid misconceptions, writes Ibn Zaddik, with reference to *The Philosopher*, it is best that we should confine ourselves to negations in speaking of God; saying, for example, that He is not unwise, rather than in the positive form, that He is wise (p. 331).

The same doctrine is very fully set forth by Maimonides, who holds that the fact of His necessary existence is all that can be positively known about God. The Divine nature cannot be expressed in terms of human qualities. The positive attributes are tolerated in the present as a concession to human weakness, and as necessary evils; but it is only by negations, the multiplication of which is regarded as a positive accession of knowledge, that the truth can be rightly expressed. The works of Maimonides made an epoch in the development of Judaism. In his own times, as he testifies in a letter upon the Resurrection, gross anthropomorphic conceptions prevailed even among the learned (p. 485); and it was not to be expected that his subtle, and as it was thought,

nihilistic theology would pass unchallenged, especially as he was not content that his doctrines should be confined to the more intellectual class, but demanded that they should be published to the multitude.

A storm of opposition accordingly arose. In Paris and Montpellier, his philosophical writings were condemned to the flames; and as a natural consequence, he was rewarded with a sudden notoriety. His works were translated from the Arabic into Hebrew, and commented upon, and his fame was rapidly extended far and wide.

A century after his death, the anthropomorphic tendency is said to have been eradicated from the Jewish mind, and the whole credit of the reform is ascribed to our author, Moses ben Maimun, whose commanding influence upon the collective Jewish community is expressed by the popular saying, which makes him second only to the son of Amram. משה ור משה לא קם כמותו.

C. TAYLOR.

The Euphrates Valley Railway.

A very interesting letter from Smyrna appears in the current number of the *Univers Israélite*, from which we learn that preparations for the construction of the Euphrates Valley Railway are being rapidly completed in the Holy Land. Mesopotamia is full of English engineers and agents who are traveling all over the country, the former making all the necessary studies and the latter purchasing lands. It appears that the line will cross the Euphrates close to Rieca, which is not far from Aleppo; will then run on the left bank of the great river towards Anbar, whence it will travel direct to Bagdad on the Tigris. The small town of Hille on the Euphrates, in the neighborhood of which are the ruins of Babylon, or as the Holy Scriptures call it Babel, will become, in consequence of its industry and commerce, one of the principal stations on this route; the more so as the ruins in the vicinity attract a large number of travelers from all parts of the world. The residence of Nebuchadnezzar—the great city which he had built—will, therefore, soon see the puffing locomotive gliding swiftly past its crumbling ramparts; and on the rivers of Babylon where the descendants of the patriarchs sat and wept over the lost glories of Zion, their children will appear as shareholders in the new railway line, and as travelers for their pleasure. Halting at Hille, they will in the course of a few hours be able to view the grandiose ruins of the palace, where twenty-five centuries ago the Babylonian generals elaborated the scheme for the conquest of Jerusalem. But besides these relics of the misty past, there are also others in this district which will not excite less interest and curiosity. Travelers will be able to see the complete and well preserved foundation of the ancient tower of Babel, which is 2,210 metres in circumference, but which is now only the home of lions and jackals. In addition to this, there are still some remains of the suspended gardens of Semiramides, the ruins of the temple of Belus; and a number of other religious edifices which in ages long gone by were dedicated to the worship of Baal, Astarte and analogous deities. When the Euphrates Valley Railway is completed, tourists will be enabled to devote a month's holiday very agreeably to visiting these relics of antiquity. The journey will be easily made in twelve days. From London to Vienna and thence to Salonica by rail would occupy five days; five more days would be employed in traveling by sea to Alexandretta, and then in two days the new railway will enable the archaeological tourist to feast his eyes on the ruins of Babylon, and view the interesting remains of a period which to Jews cannot but be highly interesting.—J. W.

MOROCCO.—There is some consolation in the thought that amid the wreck and

devastation caused by calamities, human sympathy is certain to be evoked on behalf of the sufferers; and while we mourn over the affliction produced, we feel gratified that so many should be willing to make sacrifices of self in order to assist in lessening the misery of their fellow creatures. These reflections have been awakened within us, in consequence of intelligence having been received from the famine-stricken town of Mogador, where Mr. Judah L. Yully, jr., has been foremost in establishing a fund for the relief, in kind, of some 300 children. These little ones have been daily fed for the last three months almost altogether at the expense of their benefactor, with a meal of rice, meat and bread. Not the least pleasing feature of this children's soup kitchen is that there is no distinction of race or creed, and that Moorish as well as Jewish orphans are welcomed into this charity. We understand that several benevolent ladies and gentlemen hearing of the labors of Mr. Yully have, unsolicited, given him donations towards meeting the expenses of his praiseworthy object, and carrying it on for a period of another six months. We are fully aware that our well-to-do classes have lately had quite their share of work in responding to the many appeals on behalf of the sufferers by recent disasters, both at sea and on land. There are, however, benevolent individuals who, we feel sure, would be happy to contribute to the furthering of this charitable cause.

CHICAGO SKETCHES.

BY BEN-ADAM.

Editor Jewish Advance:

Being a careful reader of your valuable journal from the very beginning, and finding it continually improving in tenor and tendency, I am convinced that you deserve all the attention and support that our Chicago Israelites and the Jehudim at large can possibly afford to extend to you. I, for my part, offer you my humble services. I am willing, if agreeable to you, to prove my appreciation of your excellent paper, by informing your general readers, from time to time, of incidents and facts of Jewish life in our great city coming under my observation.

The fame of our Garden city, situated on the shore of the beautiful Lake Michigan, is propagated far and wide; for indeed, it has performed miracles. In a comparatively short time, it has developed from an insignificant and obscure village into a metropolis of a very prominent commercial centre, commanding with its wide spread nets of railroad lines the mercantile traffic of the entire West. The metamorphose is perfectly wonderful. Where but a few decades ago the wild winds enjoyed full liberty, sweeping unchecked over the vast prairies, magnificent palaces, large stores and magazines filled with the dazzling luxuries of India, and the precious products of domestic and foreign markets abound in great numbers. These facts have often been published in the secular press and admired by the world. Every denomination having an official journal of its own, has endeavored to lay the full facts of its existence—the signs of its progress before the public, which must prove of great help to the future historians of our age. But never to my knowledge, was there an attempt made in any of the Jewish journals published in this country, to give some outlines of the history of our Jewish population, or a full description of our congregations and benevolent institutions. For a number of years, I read most of the Jewish periodicals of this country, and in all these years I frequently have met correspondents from large cities and small towns from all over this wide land, but Chicago seems to be entirely ignored or forgotten. If, once or twice in a number of years, a letter dated from Chicago

* Geschichte der Attributenlehre in der jüdischen Religion, von Dr. David Kaufman, (Göttingen: Berthes.)